



Introduction	9
1. The Warning	11
2. Flight of the Eagle	19
3. Mikkel's Test	29
4. The Long Good-bye	37
5. Water Music	41
6. Heart of Courage	45
7. Dark Secret	49
8. Bree's New Plan	57
9. Dublin	69
10. The Big Mystery	81
11. Run!	93
12. King Olaf	97

13. Tully's Question	109
14. Where's Devin?	119
15. The Dream	127
16. Whales!	131
17. Land of Fire and Ice	143
18. Forever Lost?	155
19. The Flea	161
20. Snowcapped Mountain	169
21. Erik the Red	173
22. Flowers Above the Snow	183
23. Leif Erikson's Ship	195
24. More than a Voyage	203
25. Danger, Danger!	207
26. The Dew of Heaven	217
Acknowledgments	227



When Briana O'Toole heard the sound, she was still partly asleep. *What is it?* she wondered. The noise seemed near and yet far away. What had wakened her in the darkness before dawn?

Through an open door in the barn where she slept, Bree heard fishermen load bait and tackle. Next came a scrape across the shore as they slid their boats into the Norwegian fjord. A moment later, oars creaked as men from the village of Aurland rowed away for their daily catch.

By now, on that early summer morning late in the tenth century, the sounds were familiar to Bree. *Why do such everyday noises make me afraid?*

Then Bree knew. Only last night her brother Devin had told her that he might leave for Ireland soon. Like a warning deep inside, Bree felt sure that on this day she would learn more. No doubt it would be something she must face, like it or not.

High in the hayloft where she slept, Bree pushed back her blanket. On her first night of serving Mikkel's family, she had made her own soft bed—a nest of fragrant hay gathered from a mountainside. By now nine months had passed since the Viking raid that brought Bree and other Irish captives to this village.

In spite of all that had happened, Bree smiled, for she knew something that only the Irish knew. No one else. Not Mikkel, the fifteen-year-old leader of the raid that took Bree away. Not his father, Sigurd, chieftain of the Aurland Fjord. Not his mother Rika. Nor his brother Cort. Nor his grandparents.

*My daddy is an Irish chieftain,* Bree thought. *A wise and powerful chieftain who cares about his people.* Though she appeared to be a slave, Bree held the secret knowledge of being deeply loved. She felt freedom in her heart.

Reaching out in the darkness, Bree picked up her clothing and quickly dressed. As she pulled on her shoes, she heard a sea chest being dropped heavily into a ship, then footsteps coming up the path from the fjord.

With swift movements, Bree grabbed a rung and scrambled down the ladder. Through the dark barn she

hurried, so familiar now with its turns that she needed no light. When she opened the door that connected the barn and the house, she heard Mikkel's angry voice.

"I can't!" he exclaimed. "I won't!"

Without making a sound, Bree entered the hallway that led to the large room where the family ate, slept, and talked. Then the door creaked shut and the room grew instantly silent.

It made Bree uncomfortable. *What were they saying about me?* The question pounded at her heart.

Acting as if she hadn't noticed anything unusual, Bree hurried to the long open hearth. As she stirred the embers, the fire flared, and she added more wood. Taking a large wooden spoon, she stirred the porridge. By the time a knock came on the outer door, she was ready.

When Mikkel swung the door wide, Ingmar stood outside. Taller than Mikkel and with darker blond hair, Ingmar was at least four years older. He was also master of the ship that had given safe passage to Bree's brother Devin when he sailed from Ireland to the Norwegian fjord.

Seeing Ingmar, Mikkel stepped back, as though not wanting to talk with him. Only recently the *ting*, the assembly of freemen, had settled Devin's future and the argument between Ingmar and Mikkel.

Now Ingmar's quick glance went to Bree, then back to Mikkel. Suddenly Ingmar stretched out his hand. "Our

freemen have spoken," he said. "By their vote, they freed Bree's brother, Devin."

Looking down at Ingmar's hand, Mikkel stiffened, but Ingmar went on. "You and I are blood cousins, Mikkel. Let's be friends."

For an instant Mikkel glanced toward his father Sigurd. The chieftain sat on a bench along the wall as though waiting to see what would happen. Turning back, Mikkel faced Ingmar again.

With one swift movement, Mikkel pushed aside his flyaway hair. Then, as though making a deliberate choice, he stretched out his hand and shook Ingmar's.

A look of relief filled the young man's eyes. "We finish loading my ship today," Ingmar said. "If the wind blows fair tomorrow, we will leave."

Mikkel nodded, waiting.

"I'll take Bree's brother with me." Though Ingmar spoke to the family, he watched Bree. "I'll take her sister Keely and friend Lil. I'll bring them safely to Dublin."

Without warning, Bree's eyes filled with tears. *It's here. The moment I dreaded.*

But then she understood. Ingmar had come to warn her, to give her one last day to say good-bye. As a tight knot formed in Bree's stomach, she recognized his gift. *No more snatching your family away,* Ingmar was saying without words. *I'm doing my best to help you.*

Slowly Bree put down the large wooden spoon. Her

head high, she stepped out from behind the large cooking pot that hung on a chain from the ceiling. Her shoulders back, she walked around the end of the hearth and stood before Ingmar. With the grace of a young woman before a king, Bree took the edges of her skirt in hand and curtsied low before him.

“I thank you,” she said softly.

When she looked up again, Bree saw the kindness in Ingmar’s eyes and knew she had rightly understood his wish to help her. Then she saw something more—the courage that molded Ingmar’s life to speak to Mikkel as he had.

This time Ingmar spoke directly to her. “When I return to Aurland, I’ll tell you. You will know that your brother, sister, and friend are safe in Ireland.”

Once more Bree curtsied low. As she straightened, standing tall, Ingmar nodded, accepting her thanks. As he turned away, his face showed his concern for her. When he stepped outside, he closed the door quietly.

As Bree walked back to the fire, no one spoke. When she picked up the large wooden spoon and dished up porridge, no one spoke. But now Bree guessed the meaning of Mikkel’s words as she entered the room. She felt sure his mother and father had said, “Set Bree free. Send her back to Ireland with her brother and sister.” And Mikkel answered, “*I can’t. I won’t!*”

If so, it was still another reason for Bree to be angry

with Mikkel. He knew she was a valuable slave, and his greed always won.

When Bree finished serving the family, she dished up her own porridge and took it outside. On the step overlooking the fjord, she sat, quiet and alone. In spite of the ache in her chest and the knot in her stomach, she promised herself that she would make it through.

*I can manage*, Bree thought, though it tore her apart. But the longer she watched the men load Ingmar's ship, the more difficult it became.

*One more day*, she told herself. *Tomorrow I'll be alone again.*

*Alone. For how long?*

*Forever?*

At the recent assembly where Devin was set free, Bree worked out a way to ransom her sister Keely and friend Lil. Only Bree remained a slave. Then Mikkel offered a startling plan.

"Be my storyteller," he told Devin. "If you and Bree go with me on one voyage, I'll set her free when we return home."

*Free!* Just the sound of it filled Bree with hope. *No longer a Viking slave!*

"I'm Irish," Devin told Mikkel. "I'm not like your poets."

But Mikkel insisted. "Be my storyteller. Be my friend."



Looking Mikkell straight in the eye, Devin repeated the condition. "If Bree and I go with you for one voyage, you will set her free when we return."

Now, like a sword, fear struck down Bree's courage. Deep inside, she felt a warning she could not ignore. *How good is Mikkell's promise? Can Dev and I trust him to do what's right?*

*Courage, Bree thought. I need courage to help me go beyond the fear I face.*

Just then Mikkell opened the door and came outside. Bree glanced at him and looked away. *If Dev comes back and we sail with Mikkell, will we ever see Ireland again?*





Mikkel sat down on the wooden step as far from Bree as possible without falling off. Sparks of resentment lit his eyes and flushed his cheeks. After one angry look at Bree, he turned his back to her.

When Mikkel's father, Sigurd, came outside, he walked down the steps between them, turned, and faced them.

Mighty chieftain of the Aurland Fjord, Sigurd had the blue eyes and strong look Mikkel had inherited. With his gray-white hair and beard trimmed short, Sigurd appeared as healthy as when Bree met him nine months before. In the sunlight that shone between the mountains, Bree studied his skin.

*Yes! No open sores. No leprosy!*

Bree smiled, filled with gladness of heart. Often she had wondered about Sigurd's travels and the terrible disease known in Ireland and many parts of the world. Now Bree wanted to shout, "Wise, kind Sigurd is well!"

Never before, except in the Bible, had Bree heard of someone being healed of leprosy. Yet the chieftain of the Aurland Fjord stood before them, clean.

Closing her eyes, Bree offered a prayer of thanks. As she opened them again, Sigurd's deep voice rumbled with gratitude.

"Thank you, Bree, for telling me about your God."

Bree still felt awed by what God had done. "I'm so glad that He healed you," she said. But Bree knew it was Grandfather who talked most often with Sigurd.

When Bree stole a look at Mikkell, he, too, stared at Sigurd. Even now, Mikkell's gaze traveled over every inch of his father's skin. "It's true!" Mikkell exclaimed, as though it had suddenly sunk in.

Stepping close, Sigurd clapped his son on the shoulder. "Yes, it's really true."

The excitement in Mikkell's face overflowed in his voice. "Even though you stood up in front of everyone, telling all of us—"

"I know," Sigurd said. "It didn't seem real to me either. It still doesn't."

"All those months—"

"Yes. All those months when I kept getting worse—"

All those months when it seemed to Bree that nothing happened. That God wasn't answering Grandfather's prayers, or Rika's, or Dev's, or hers. Then *suddenly*—

"I want to go see our king," Sigurd said now. "He's a Christian, Bree. I want to show him what happened."

"We could sail to Iceland together!" Mikkel exclaimed, as though suddenly realizing the possibilities.

"But first I want to talk with King Olaf," Sigurd said. "I need to speak my gratitude to Bree's God—to tell what He did."

Suddenly Mikkel slouched back against the step. *What's the matter?* Bree wanted to ask. Did Mikkel want his father to be healed without believing in the God who did it?

Sigurd interrupted her thoughts. "Did you tell Bree?" Mikkel shook his head.

"Why not?" Mikkel's mother Rika spoke from the open doorway behind them.

"At the *ting* I promised that if Devin and Bree sail with me on one voyage, I'll free her when we return home."

In the silence that followed, Bree looked from Sigurd to Rika, then back to Mikkel.

"Bree says her God protects her wherever she goes," he said, looking at his mother.

Rika gasped. "Her God protects her *wherever* she is? Is that true, Bree?"

In that moment Bree remembered her brother's words. "Be careful," Devin had warned. "Mikkel will want you along on a voyage. He'll think that if you're on the ship, he'll be safe."

So. Dev was right. It had happened.

More than anything, Bree did not want to make a false promise to Rika, who had already lost a son to the sea.

"My God—my Jesus—has promised to be with me always," Bree said. "He's promised to protect me. That means if I die, I'll go to be with Him in Heaven."

"You could still die in a storm?" Mikkel was curious now.

"Of course." Bree grinned. "So you don't need me along on your voyage."

"Yes, I do," Mikkel said quickly. "You pray to your God, and I'll pray to mine. That will take care of everything."

But Bree looked at Mikkel's mother. When her husband and sons were gone, Rika saw to every detail of taking care of the house and farm. All day long she made decisions, and she seldom delayed in what she did.

"I've changed my mind," Rika said to Mikkel. "When you go to sea, Bree should cook your meals."

Mikkel's grin spread from ear to ear. But Sigurd had the last word.

“When Mikkel returns from one voyage, he keeps his promise. Bree goes back to her family in Ireland.”

Mikkel nodded, his eyes and face solemn. But the minute his father and mother started down to the fjord, Mikkel grinned again.

“So!” Bree’s voice was as hard as the iron rivets holding the boards in Mikkel’s new ship. “You talked your parents into what you wanted.”

Mikkel laughed. “I didn’t fool them. My mother liked what I said.”

But Bree’s anger spilled over. Both Sigurd and Rika were strong-minded people. “They said you should send me home, didn’t they?”

At first Bree thought Mikkel wasn’t going to answer. “Didn’t they?” she asked again.

Without looking at her, he nodded. That made Bree even more angry. “Why don’t you let me go? I’m just another Irish your Vikings captured during the raid.”

As though it wasn’t important, Mikkel shrugged. But to Bree it was life or death, even the air she breathed. “It was your fault that I became a slave.”

When Mikkel grew still, Bree knew she had hit a tender spot. “Your own father said you’ll never be free until you set things right.”

Suddenly Mikkel flared up. “I can’t correct what I did. What’s more, I don’t want to.”

Anger burned through his tightly held control. “How

many Irish did my ship bring to Norway? How can I send every one of them back?"

"You can start by sending me home."

"Forget it, Bree. Life is life. You're a slave. That's the way it is."

"No, it's not. I'm not a slave. I never have been. I never will be. No matter how often you call me a slave, I am not."

For a moment she almost told him that she was the daughter of a much-loved Irish chieftain. Instead, bitter words spilled out. "I hate you, hate you, hate you!"

"I know."

Mikkel's quiet words struck Bree more than his anger possibly could. "Why don't you send me off so you don't have to see me again?" she asked.

But Mikkel did not answer. In that moment Bree felt sure that his choice to keep her here was not something she could change, no matter how hard she tried.

Knowing how she would feel when her brother and sister left the next morning, Bree looked toward the Aurland River. A golden eagle soared in the clear air above the mountains. It reminded Bree of the freedom she needed.

"Mikkel, this is the last day I can be with Dev and Keely. Can we climb the mountains together?"

Startled, Mikkel turned to stare at her. "Are you serious?"



“Why not?”

“You’ll figure out a way to escape.”

“I want a day we can remember.”

“No!”

Bree sighed. “I don’t want to work all the livelong day.”

Instead of answering, Mikkel stood up. Tall and slender, he had surprised Bree more than once with how quickly he moved. Sometimes she wondered if he could run as quickly as the reindeer that roamed the mountaintops. But now Bree knew she was about to lose a day with her brother and sister.

“Come with us, Mikkel.”

“Come with you?” he asked.

Bree saw the surprise in his face. “Why not?”

Instead of meeting her eyes, Mikkel looked up at the mountains. Again Bree saw the eagle and wished she could soar just as freely.

Mikkel turned to her. “Bree, I’ve promised you two things. When the *ting* freed Devin, I asked him to come back after he takes Keely and Lil home. I promised that if both of you go with me on the first voyage in my new ship, I’ll give you, Bree, your freedom.”

“But how do I know if you’ll keep your promise?” she asked.

“When you were taken as a slave, I promised to watch out for you. Have I done it?”

As Bree thought back, she remembered one time after another when Mikkell had kept that promise. Thinking about those dangerous moments, it surprised her. “You have,” she said. “And I usually don’t thank you, do I?”

Mikkell grinned. “Well, you can start thanking me now by being civil.”

“Civil.”

“Polite. Not really nice. That would be too much to ask. But not rude.”

*Civil.* Bree thought about it. Usually she was civil to Mikkell only when she had to be. In front of his parents and townspeople, for instance. Because she was a slave for Mikkell’s family, they expected her to treat him with a certain level of respect.

“Civil,” Bree said again. “All right. I can manage that, even when someone isn’t watching.”

“And if you *really* want to stretch yourself, you could even be friendly like your brother Devin.”

“Oh, no!” Bree exclaimed. “That’s going too far. Dev promised that if he comes back from Ireland, he’ll be your storyteller and friend. But I’m not willing to be your friend. Not ever. Not in a thousand years.”

“All right. I agree.” Mikkell grinned again. “Civil. Even when you don’t have to because someone is watching.”

Bree nodded, but wondered why it seemed important to him. It had never occurred to her to work together

with Mikkel. Always Bree had wanted to just get along well enough to get what she wanted.

Now she wondered, *What would happen if I helped him? If I even worked to make his trip a success? Maybe I would be able to go home more quickly!*

“One more thing,” she said. “Why don’t you show us your favorite place?”

Turning, Mikkel again faced the steep mountains across the Aurland River. “From here it’s hard to point out.”

Bree was curious now. “Why is it your favorite?”

“When you see it, you’ll know.”

“You mean we can go?” Bree’s delight spilled into her voice.

To her surprise Mikkel nodded. “I’ll show you the spot I like more than any other. You fix some food. I’ll go for your sister Keely. As soon as I bring her back, we’ll get Devin.”

Bree couldn’t believe it. “Oh, *tusen takk!* A thousand thanks!”

Mikkel looked embarrassed. “Civil, I said. You don’t have to overdo it.”

Without another word he set out for the farm where Keely had lived for nearly seven years. Bree could hardly believe that Mikkel had given her time with Dev and Keely.

Looking up, Bree saw the eagle again. It soared

## HEART OF COURAGE

directly above her now, where she could see it clearly. *God seems quite good at doing miracles.* With no one but Him to hear, Bree laughed out loud.